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PROGRESS REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF UNCTAD'S PUBLICATIONS POLICY

Report by the UNCTAD secretariat

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1. The principles underlying UNCTAD's publications policy and the guidelines governing their implementation are contained in the *Report on documentation and publications* (TD/B/EX(15)/5). The *Report* represents the outcome of the work of a task force established by the Secretary-General of UNCTAD in 1996 following the Trade and Development Board's discussion on publications policy at its forty-third session. The Secretary-General endorsed the *Report* in May 1997. Apart from guiding principles, the *Report* contains a number of specific recommendations designed to respond to the needs of member States, to conform to recent changes in United Nations publications policy, to improve UNCTAD's impact and outreach, and to make the most cost-effective use of resources. The present report describes progress to date in the implementation of the *Report*'s recommendations, as well as developments external to UNCTAD which have a bearing on the institution's publications policy.

1. Preparation of the publications programme

2. A core recommendation of the *Report* was the establishment of a Publications Committee to assume overall responsibility for overseeing the effective implementation of UNCTAD's publications policy and for developing further innovations. The Publications Committee was duly appointed in October 1997 under the chairmanship of the Deputy Secretary-General. It has met twice to date, addressing matters of immediate concern, including co-publishing and self-assessment.

3. A major task of the Publications Committee ahead of each biennium is to plan and approve a draft publications programme prior to the submission of UNCTAD's programme budget proposals to United Nations Headquarters. In examining the publications programme proposed by Divisions, the Committee will, in particular, seek to ensure that publications respect United Nations criteria, comply with mandates, reflect priorities and correspond to real needs. In this exercise, the Committee will also be guided by the lessons learned through the feedback received via assessment mechanisms during the previous biennium. In this way, when the time comes for the Secretary-General of UNCTAD to share his proposed publications programme with the Working Party on the Medium-term Plan and Programme Budget before a submission is made to the appropriate secretariat and intergovernmental processes in New York, he will be able to present a list of publications that has been through a more systematic screening process than was the case in the past. As called for in the *Report*, the planning of the publications programme for the 2000-2001 biennium will, therefore, be initiated by the Publications Committee in September 1998; and the Secretary-General of UNCTAD will make available to member States late in 1998 his proposed list of publications for the new biennium, in fulfillment of paragraph 107(a) of "A Partnership for Growth and Development" (TD/378).

4. With regard to the publications programme for the 1998-1999 biennium, it will be recalled that detailed information was first presented to the Working Party at its January 1997 session. Subsequently, the Secretary-General of UNCTAD submitted his draft programme budget, including the list of proposed publications, to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, taking into account the comments of the Working Party. Meanwhile, the UNCTAD secretariat conducted a survey of the proposed publications, the results of which were made available to member States in May. In June the Working Party considered the UNCTAD part of the programme budget proposed by the Secretary-General of the United Nations to the General Assembly. Thus, when the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC) and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

(ACABQ) considered the proposed programme budget, they were able to take into account the views and comments of the Working Party. The Fifth Committee then reviewed the programme budget in the light of the views of CPC and ACABQ, and adopted a resolution approving UNCTAD's programme budget, including the publications programme, for 1998-1999.

5. A second key recommendation of the *Report* concerned the establishment of a Flagship Report Review Panel, whose role is to coordinate UNCTAD's three main annual publications: the *Trade and Development Report*, the *World Investment Report*, and the *Least Developed Countries Report*. The Panel aims to facilitate a regular cross-fertilization of ideas, prevent overlap, and promote complementarity and policy consistency among these reports. It is also responsible for considering practical aspects of the reports such as the potential for reducing costs; the staggering of release dates; and the scope for commercial publishing or co-publishing. The Panel was constituted in November 1997 and has met on two occasions to review the outlines of the 1998 editions of the three reports. With the establishment of this Panel, UNCTAD now satisfies the organization-wide requirement, recently endorsed by the General Assembly, that all major publications should be subject to in-house clearance by a review body.

2. The planning of individual publications

6. Once the publications programme has been approved, planning for production of individual publications can commence. The *Report* confirmed the validity of the planning system for intergovernmental meetings which was established by the Secretary-General in February 1997. As part of that system, outlines of parliamentary documentation are discussed well in advance of the meeting concerned. Also in response to another of the *Report*'s recommendations, authors have started to place outlines and drafts of documents for comment by other members of the secretariat on an *ad hoc* cc:Mail bulletin board.

7. An important objective of UNCTAD's publications policy is to ensure policy consistency across the secretariat and conformity with established guidelines. The Secretary-General has entrusted Directors with the primary responsibility for the clearance of documents and for the quality of the output of their Divisions. At the same time, he has established a supervisory mechanism for policy clearance under the authority of the Deputy Secretary-General. Publications covered include parliamentary documentation, as well as the recurrent and non-recurrent publications featured in the publications programme, with the exception of the three flagship reports, which are dealt with by the Panel described above. The *Report* expressed support for the policy clearance mechanism, updated the relevant guidelines and called for their strict enforcement.

8. The new guidelines were brought to the attention of the secretariat, together with a reminder of the importance which the Secretary-General attributes to the policy clearance mechanism. They permit only one document for each agenda item and two substantive items per meeting. In conformity with the 1996 decision of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, parliamentary documentation should not exceed 16 pages. These documents should be submitted for clearance and editing 12 weeks ahead of the starting date of a meeting, so that the 10-week UNOG deadline can be met. In the interests of speedier and more cost-effective processing of documentation, the Editorial Section of the Intergovernmental Support Service (ISS) has begun establishing an "Editorial Guidelines" cc:Mail bulletin board for the use of staff and consultants.

9. As also called for by the *Report*, a system of active monitoring of the documentation production process has been established under the responsibility of ISS, which liaises with Divisions and with the appropriate UNOG services. Documentation focal points are being designated in each Division to follow the documentation production and to liaise with ISS.

10. The second half of 1997 saw a further marked improvement in the secretariat's performance in terms of meeting deadlines for the printing and distribution of documents for intergovernmental meetings (76 per cent of pre-session documents were submitted in time for the 10-week rule or not more than three days late, as opposed to 66 per cent in 1996 and 52 per cent in 1995). This development was largely due to the active monitoring described above and secretariat efforts to reduce the time required for clearance and editing.

11. In the implementation of the new programme of work established after UNCTAD IX, the documents and publications listed in the annex (TD/B/EX(16)/3/Add.1) were processed and published in 1997. Approximately half of UNCTAD's published materials in 1997 belonged to the category of parliamentary documentation. Of this, the reports of proceedings and outcomes of intergovernmental meetings accounted for one third, while the other major category of parliamentary documentation - the analytical reports prepared to support the intergovernmental debate on substantive agenda items - made up the remaining two thirds. The other half of UNCTAD's publications fell into the non-parliamentary category and arose from the implementation of the substantive and operational components of the work programme. As the *Report on Documentation and Publications* pointed out, UNCTAD's development mission can only be realized if both the results of policy research and analytical work and the lessons derived from field operations reach the individuals and institutions which shape and implement policies in member States. Apart from the analytical reports prepared for intergovernmental meetings referred to above, the dissemination of information for this purpose takes place through various types of publications. In 1997, these included directories, handbooks, CD-ROMS, analytical reports and books -- including some produced jointly with other organizations -- newsletters and bulletins, discussion papers, and information and technical materials arising from technical cooperation projects.

3. Dissemination

12. In line with the *Report*'s recommendation, a closer working relationship with UNOG has been established. UNCTAD is represented on the UNOG Working Group of the Publications Board, which deals with a range of matters relating to publications delegated to it by the Publications Board in New York. These include reviewing the publications programmes of departments based in Geneva. UNCTAD has also been seeking UNOG's expertise in the area of marketing and sales, particularly regarding co-publishing opportunities, and it is exploring the possibility of recovering some of the revenue from the sale of its publications for the purpose of reinvesting it in its own publications programme. This issue is being addressed throughout the United Nations system. In his recent comments on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit (see below), the Secretary-General of the United Nations has welcomed further study of the possibility of making a portion of the income earned by publications available to author departments for product development, maintenance of databases, start-up costs and other activities to increase sales revenue.

13. In accordance with the *Report*'s recommendations, the use of the Internet for dissemination of parliamentary and other documentation has been further enhanced over the past year. It is now possible to download pre-sessional documents in English from UNCTAD's World Wide Web site four weeks in advance of the relevant intergovernmental meeting. It is intended to provide the same facility in French and Spanish in the course of 1998. Furthermore, the substantive output of meetings appears on the Web site as soon as it is in final form. Executive summaries of the three flagship reports are now available on the Web site, along with ordering information. The 1994, 1995 and 1996 editions of UNCTAD's *Guide to Publications*, which include titles, symbols and abstracts of the main reports and studies, as well as abstracts of UNCTAD *Discussion Papers*, are also now accessible through the Internet. It is recognized, however, that despite these enhancements there is still room for improvement, particularly with regard to the accessing of documents and publications. (UNCTAD's Web site address is currently http://www.unicc.org/unctad and will shortly be http://www.unctad.org.)

14. Divisions have direct responsibility for authoring those portions of the Web site under their respective purviews. UNCTAD's Information Technology Board fulfills the monitoring, coordinating and peer-review roles necessary to the management of a complex site. When resources permit, the contents of UNCTAD's Web site will be reproduced on CD-ROM periodically to provide the information to those without full Internet access.

15. Particularly in this area of information technology, human and financial resource constraints are affecting the implementation of some of the *Report*'s recommendations. For example, it has not yet been possible to establish an electronic documentation production chain, as called for in the *Report*. An UNCTAD Internet site in all the official languages remains a longer-term goal.

4. Assessment

16. A number of the *Report*'s recommendations regarding assessment of the impact of publications are being carried out. Apart from being available on UNCTAD's Web site, readership survey forms are also being distributed and collected in conjunction with the registration process for intergovernmental meetings. At the same time, a select number of publications are being subjected to in-depth scrutiny on an annual basis. This involves identifying a sample of readers, sending a questionnaire and following up to ensure that the process yields a high rate of response. The results from this and other feedback exercises will be made available to member States.

5. External developments

17. The Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs (EC-ESA) -- one of four executive committees set up by the Secretary-General of the United Nations -- commissioned a review of United Nations economic reports by the United Nations University's World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU/WIDER) in 1997. The review examined the flagship reports in the economic field, including the *Trade and Development Report (TDR)*, the *World Investment Report (WIR)*, the *Least Developed Countries Report (LDCR)*, the *World Economic and Social Survey (WESS)*, the *Human Development Report* (HDR) and regional economic surveys with a view to identifying possible areas of overlap, inconsistencies and

specific value added. The EC-ESA is about to consider the results of the review, together with those of a parallel review of United Nations flagship reports in the social field undertaken by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD). At the present time, the Secretary-General of UNCTAD can state that the UNU-WIDER review concluded that "though there are some overlaps, each and every one of these reports makes a fairly distinctive contribution in separate areas, that is each contributes significant net value added to our understanding of development issues." The review found that "the standards of all the reports tend to fluctuate between fairly good and excellent". It praised in particular the high quality of UNCTAD's *TDR* and *WIR*, saying that they "combine solid economic analysis with innovative analysis, on widely debated issues". It also found that the data provided in the reports are to a large extent new and additional to that provided by other international organisations and are on the whole consistent across the reports. It recommended that the other reports follow the *TDR*'s example of exploring one carefully chosen special theme each year. It found a fairly clear division of labour amongst the five broadly focused reports, with some overlap between UNCTAD's *TDR* and the *WESS*, produced by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA). The review also suggested possible improvements such as reducing length (*WIR*), paring descriptive parts on the world economy (*TDR*) and increasing interaction between these two reports on the links between trade and foreign direct investment, and strengthening analytical rigour (*LDCR*).

18. Also in 1997 the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) prepared a report for the General Assembly entitled *United Nations publications: Enhancing cost-effectiveness in implementing legislative mandates* (JIU/REP/97/2). It reviewed the following aspects of United Nations publishing activities: the relevance, usefulness and potential for duplication of existing United Nations publications; publications policies and practices, as well as the administrative, managerial and organizational set-up and oversight of the publishing activities of the United Nations secretariat; and various issues concerning the planning, production and sales/distribution stages of the publishing process. The report's recommendations, which were published shortly after the report of the UNCTAD task force on publications, validate the thrust and objectives of UNCTAD's publications policy. For example, the JIU stresses the need for creating oversight mechanisms in author departments. This need has been addressed in UNCTAD by the establishment of a Publications Committee. Specific references to UNCTAD in the report include praise for UNCTAD's attempts at eliciting feedback from readers; using a "zero-based" approach in rewriting the post-Midrand work programme; cost identification and transparency vis-a-vis member States; and joint publishing with other organizations. The General Assembly will be discussing the JIU report at its resumed fifty-second session, taking into account the Secretary-General's comments (A/52/685).

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[1] This issue has already been dealt with in the context of the agreement between UNCTAD and DESA on closer cooperation in the field of macroeconomic analysis.